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Editorial Reviews

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YA-- Gardner asserts that the most critical problem challenging the U. S. today is its lack of leadership. With excellent illustrations of his theories on leadership that go beyond charisma to high confidence, and shared values on the part of those in charge and their followers. Giving historic leaders, Gardner shows the tremendous amount of energy, talent, and dormant enthusiasm that effective leaders in all levels of society. Given the current apathetic situation he decries, this book should be required reading for all high-school social studies classes. Gardner challenges leaders to their positions in the bastions of the American democracy now or face the dismal consequences. - Barbara Batty, Port Arthur I.S.D., TX

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Book Description

Leaders today are familiar with the demand that they come forward with a new vision. But it is a new vision out of whole cloth. A vision relevant for us today will build on values deeply embedded in our own tradition. It is not as though we come to the task unready. Men and women from the beginning have groped and struggled for various pieces of the answer. The materials out of which we build the strivings of the species, today and in the distant past.

Most of the ingredients of a vision for this country have been with us for a long time. As the poet has said, "The light is shining still." That we have failed and fumbled in some of our attempts to achieve our great ideas still beckon—freedom, equality, justice, the release of human possibilities. The vision of our past and to reach the goals we have yet to achieve—with respect to our domestic problems and worldwide.

—From the Preface to *On Leadership*

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★★★★★ **Very Informative**, January 7, 2000

Reviewer: **Leon M. Bodevin** (LeMoore, CA) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

This is a book from one of the great observers of leaders in our country. Gardner emphasizes community building as the basis for great leadership. He also spends a great deal of time discussing how a leader must renew himself and his organization. Buy this book and Howard Gardner's *Leading*.

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3 of 4 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Classic leadership text**, August 13, 2006

Reviewer: **Richard W. Cummins** (Pasco, WA) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

Gardner's first sentence of his introduction, "Why do we not have better leadership?" is first a definition of leadership attached to a disclaimer: "attention to leadership alone is sterile--and topic of which leadership is a subtopic is the accomplishment of group purpose" [italics original] is furthered by people other than individuals traditionally identified by leaders, such as "innovative thinkers." He did not intend "to deal with either leadership or its related subjects comprehensively" but "to illuminate aspects of the subject that may be of use in facing our present dilemmas--as a species" (p. xvi).

His book accomplished his purpose by highlighting, in vignettes, what by the 1990s had become leadership--traits, contexts, leader-follower dynamics, and so forth. In this sense, Gardner's book, particular by his extensive political examples, is in the genre of classic leadership textbooks, the question posed in his first sentence was the book-length elaboration of the final sentence of his introduction: "Leadership is better. Much, much better" (p. xix).

His contributions to the field of leadership studies include his discussion of "dispersed leadership" through the text, his thoughts about renewal, and his discussion of how leadership and follower potential. His extended definition of leadership, found on the first page of the first chapter, is "a process of persuasion or example by which a leader (or leadership team) induces a group to do what the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 1).

His book is a goldmine of aphoristic insights into leadership:

- * The concept of accountability is as important as the concept of leadership. (p. xviii)
- * The first step is not action; the first step is understanding. (p. xviii)
- * Many people with power are without leadership gifts. (p. 2)
- * Many writers on leadership take considerable pains to distinguish between leaders and managers. Leaders generally end up looking like a cross between Napoleon and the Pied Piper, and managers like clods. This troubles me. (p.3)
- * Values always decay over time. Societies that keep their values alive do so not by escaping but by powerful processes of regeneration [italics original]. (p. 13)
- * Indeed, one could argue that willingness to engage in battle when necessary is the sine qua non of leadership. (p. 14)
- * Leaders are invariably symbols. (p. 18)
- * Achieving a goal may simply make the next goal more urgent: inside every solution are the seeds of the next problem. And as Donald Michael has pointed out, most of the time most things are out of hand. No leader knows it. (p. 22)
- * Executives are given subordinates; they have to earn followers [italics original]. (p. 24)
- * Woodrow Wilson said, "The ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people." (p. 25)
- * One ambitious young lawyer asked one went about winning trust, and the senior partner said, "Be trustworthy." (p. 33)
- * Hobbes said that the reputation of power is power [italics original]. (p. 34)
- * As Peter Drucker put it, Vail saw that the only way to keep Bell a private company was "to manage it more forcefully than any public agency could." (p. 45)
- * He said, "He's a superb crisis manager, which is fortunate because his lack of judgment leads to his success." (p. 46)

49)

* Acclaim and derision are the rewards of leadership. (p. 53)

* So the public (even the reasonably well-informed public) is deprived of the opportunity so to exercise its native judgment in choosing the candidate who meets its needs. It knows its r the candidates--only skillfully manufactured facsimiles thereof. (p. 54)

* To say a leader is preoccupied with power is like saying that a tennis player is preoccupied opponent cannot return. Of course leaders are preoccupied with power! The significant quest they use to gain it? How do they exercise it? To what ends do they exercise it? (p. 57)

* Our federal government is the biggest carrot-and-stick warehouse in the world. No wonder (p. 61)

* In our society public opinion is a notable source of power. (p. 61)

* A familiar failing of visionaries and of people who live in the realm of ideas and issues is th soil their hands with the nuts and bolts of organizational functioning. (p. 65)

* Even veteran observers are bemused by the overreaching of some who exercise power. It wonder that such ancient and dreary vice can spring up so freshly. (p. 66)

* And who remembers the reigning princes? What heritage was left by those who held great was teaching, or when Isaiah was prophesying or when Jesus spoke by the lakeside? (p. 76)

* Cyert and March point out that an organization is generally a coalition of individuals and gr engaged in continuous bargaining for power. (p. 91)

* Mark Twain said, "There isn't a parallel of latitude that but thinks it would have been the ec rights" People who think of themselves as victims are in no mood to collaborate with ot future. (p. 96)

* Pluralism that reflects no commitments whatever to the common good is pluralism gone be

* Leaders unwilling to seek mutually workable arrangements with systems external to their c long-term interests of their constituents. [italics original] (p. 99)

* Hitler said, "The art of leadership consists of consolidating the attention of the people again 104)

* Transactional leadership accepts and works within the structure as it is. Transformational l

* Leaders must understand the interweaving of continuity and change. [italics original] (p. 1.

* The person who works for social change must not be assumed to be a believer in Utopia ar Change will occur. We must cope. Leaders should understand the point made by Francis Bacon will not apply new remedies must expect new evils; for time is the greatest innovator." (p. 1.

* A feature of the trance of nonrenewal is that individuals can look straight at a flaw in the sy flaw. (p. 126)

* Nothing is more vital to the renewal of an organization than the arrangements by which ab moved into positions where they can make their greatest contributions. (p. 127)

* H.G. Wells said, "Leaders should lead as far as they can and then vanish. Their ashes shou have lit." (p. 132)

* There is no doubt that a certain number of top executives have, in the secrecy of their min or another portion of their responsibilities. (p. 133)

* Pity the leader who is caught between unloving critics and uncritical lovers. (p. 135)

* The final issue is the most serious. Power lodges somewhere. When "the people" take pow or group they dislike, they may inadvertently empower those they like even less. In a leader power lodge? (p. 142)

* There is a French saying, "Be sure you want the consequences of what you want." (p. 142)

* Most of the endlessly debated questions about leadership are ancient, but there is one that ring: How can we define the role of leaders in the way that most effectively releases the crea the pursuit of shared purposes [italics original]. (p. 143)

* The first duties of citizens are not of a sophisticated political nature. Those duties are to lo family circle, get themselves educated and equipped to support themselves, obey the law, p children as responsible members of the community. These are authentic forms of participati mentioned in discussions of the subject. (p. 145)

* The generalization may be that explosive crises produce great leaders, creeping crises do r

* They learn that it is how they perform as individuals that counts, not how they relate to ot that many young executives--even middle-aged executives--are still pirouetting for some scc with little thought of their possible constituency. Their gaze is directed upward, at the execut

want to worm their way into, at the executive vice-presidents they want to impress. They are to the people at their own level or below, whom they might hope to lead. (p. 167)

* Experience, thought to be the best teacher, is sometimes a confusing teacher. Robert Benc teaches a boy fidelity, perseverance, and to turn around three times before lying down. (p. 1

* Mentors are "growers," good farmers rather than inventors or mechanics. (p. 169)

* No leadership course can affect young men and women so powerfully as a well-designed se (p. 175)

* Are these just questions to be tossed into the box that lies beyond the in-box and the out- there should be a third box, labeled Too Hard.) (p. 182) [note: this is the segue quotation to

* As a consequence, beneath the surface of most constituencies are dormant volcanoes of er Oddly, when leaders tap those geothermal sources and evoke intense responses, we attribut subterranean fires but to charisma in the leader. (p. 186)

* Your identity is what you have committed yourself to--whether the commitment is to your to your life work, to loved ones, to the common good, or to coming generations. (p. 189)

* We are not only problem solvers but problem seekers. If a suitable problem is not at hand, are invented problems. We are designed for the climb, not for taking our ease, either in the 195)

* Harlan Cleveland points out that the leader has little choice but to be optimistic. The analy: can afford not to be. But taking a positive view is not something that effective leaders have t temperament, and no doubt had much to do with their attainment of a leadership role. It ma said, "I'd be a pessimist but it would never work." (p. 196)

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1 of 2 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Gardner is a classic**, August 2, 2006

Reviewer: **J. Graham** (Toronto) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

A classic book. I read it for the purposes of educational leadership. I have read Fullan and th holds its own with a succinct presentation of the necessities around corporate leadership. It i this way to become outdated.

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★★★★★ **"it is not the performance of the individual that counts, but how one relat**

Reviewer: **Sonya D. Stutts "LuvnRed"** (Smyrna, GA) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

John Gardner opens with the question that I have often pondered myself, "Why do we not ha me, the following question is 'how did these people obtain their position?' Of course the latte scope of Gardner's text.

Gardner does explain the attributes of a leader, basic components of leadership and its place scale organizations. The author enlivens this academic material by breathing political history into its application. The discussion comes full circle when Gardner segues into leadership development and the release of human potential.

Personally, I relished absorbing and will emphasize the value of Chapter 13, 'Sharing Leadership'. Most of the material colorfully delivered has been the foundation of leadership in its application. I find most of these precepts in any leadership text. But in Chapter 13, Gardner ties the principles of leadership to the parties responsible. Leaders must be accountable for their actions & outcomes and conversely, subordinates/constituents are responsible for holding their leader accountable. Gardner does not ignore the responsibility of the subordinate/constituent because they act as a check & balance component. Furthermore, Gardner challenges the leader to trust, empower and hold his or her subordinates accountable for their jurisdiction and involve their energy & ideas. Gardner left me with the impression that accepting responsibility and sharing in leadership tasks can have a positive ripple effect on the entire organization.

Gardner sells well the 'power of one' in terms of taking responsibility, be an active participant, be a better human being. As a leader, we should teach responsibility through empowerment and eliciting participation, embracing various perspectives, and learning from less-than-desirable experiences. Gardner proposes leadership development may begin as early as birth as a result of proactive parenting. Leadership is unleashed through carefully crafted conduct, circumstantial crises or happenstance. Whenever a crisis emerges, it is the necessary renewal in the leadership process.

I was very pleased with this read and recommend it to anyone interested in understanding the role of a leader, the expectations of leadership, and measures you can take to become more leader-like.

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★★★★☆ **Dr. Anderson's comments**, October 24, 2005

Reviewer: **Richard Anderson** - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

Good introduction to the concept of leadership. Much more focused on political leadership than most.

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★★★★☆ **weLEAD Book Review by the Editor of leadingtoday.org**, February 16, 2004

Reviewer: **Greg L. Thomas** (Litchfield, Ohio United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

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This is a book that can rightly be called a classic to those who study the subject of leadership. It is old but is still used by many universities as a textbook for their leadership or business classes. It is called a renaissance man due to his many talents and achievements. With a formal education, a teacher, corporate officer, public-servant in the government, respected author, and military leader, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. Through these experiences he has learned much about the subject of leadership. On Leadership is written from the heart and discusses the author's philosophy of leadership.

reflections on what it takes to lead others. He defines leadership as "the process of persuading individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by her followers".

Gardner begins by stressing the lack of leadership in the U.S. He believes this is a critical problem and that leaders are desperately needed to tackle the obvious monumental societal problems that exist. The book has a common thread on the critical need for leadership development. The author provides examples to highlight his theories on leadership. On Leadership begins by stressing that understanding is an important first step. Leaders must be accountable, and must be held accountable for their actions. They are taking us where they are taking us. He also does not shy away from a bold discussion on the importance of social integrity and responsibility. A major emphasis of this work is that individuals at all segments must demonstrate initiative and responsible leadership. He refers to this as dispersed leadership. "Vitality at middle and lower levels of leadership can produce greater vitality in the higher levels."

The seventeen chapters of the book culminate with a "call to action" and a foretaste of what lies ahead if we heed the call. In the last chapter entitled The Release of Human Possibilities, Gardner says, "Leaders we see on the surface can be discouraging - people, even very able people, caught in the short-term, plowing narrow self-beneficial furrows through life. What leaders have to remember is that under that somnolent surface is the creature that builds civilizations, the dreamer of dreams, remembering that, the leader must reach down to the springs that never dry up, the ever-fresh spirit."

You may or may not agree with all the ideas and concepts that On Leadership presents. However, given a tremendous amount of material for personal reflection and self-discovery. This is a good book. A weakness may exist in a few sections that are difficult to read due to an academic orientation.

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